

TESTIMONY OF HOWARD LEIBOWITZ
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ON BEHALF OF MAYOR THOMAS M. MENINO

IN SUPPORT OF S. 348 –
AN ACT TO FACILITATE THE GROWTH OF INNOVATIVE FOOD ENTERPRISES IN THE COMMONWEALTH

June 27, 2013

Senator Pacheco, Representative Gobi, Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify for Mayor Menino on behalf of Senate Bill 348, “An Act to Facilitate the Growth of Innovative Food Enterprises in the Commonwealth”, filed by Senator Chang-Diaz on the Mayor’s behalf, and co-sponsored by eight members of the Legislature. This bill would create a Massachusetts Food Innovation Trust Fund, to support small and growing food enterprises across our state.

One of the first promises that Mayor Menino made when he took office was to work to locate “a supermarket for every person, in every neighborhood”. Since he came into office, we have more than doubled the number of markets in the city, particularly in neighborhoods like Roxbury and Dorchester, where many chains had moved away in previous years. We are also proud of the boom in farmers markets in Boston, as we now have 29 farmers markets in Boston, including 2 new Winter Markets, providing fresh, local foods to neighbors. We also support the Boston Bounty Bucks program, which doubles the value of food stamps for low income families that shop at farmers markets. The program has been very popular and has spread to other cities.

So we support the idea of financing retail food ventures for those neighborhoods that are in need. We also believe that there is a boom in entrepreneurial food initiatives, for-profit and non-profit, that goes beyond retail development. S348 is modeled after California’s FreshWorks Fund, which was started with a \$30 million capital infusion by that state, and has leveraged many times that state investment with foundation dollars, corporate donations, program related investments and federal Fresh Food Initiatives monies, a total of \$264 million. We took that legislation and adapted it for broader use and greater impact. I would also note that California is a much larger state, so that a smaller initial investment could have an equally significant impact, proportionately.

Now, what types of projects could be funded, let’s start with this:

Boston has a very successful food incubator at the Brewery in Jamaica Plain run by Crop Circle, 36 companies are located there now, and there’s a long waiting list to get in. To accommodate this need, Crop Circle is looking to renovate the old Pearl Meats building in Grove Hall, creating jobs and economic activity in a community that really needs it. The City has committed over \$3.5 million to the project and federal New Market Tax Credits were also available, but it took some time for the state to identify funds which will help the project break ground this summer. If there had been an explicit state program for food innovation, precious months would have been saved along with costs.

There are similar startup food ventures taking shape all across the city, the Dorchester Food Coop; Higher Ground Farm, which will be one of the largest rooftop farms in the country on top of the Boston

Design Center and The Fresh Truck, which will sell fresh fruits and vegetables in low income communities across our city. We also have seen plans for more urban greenhouses and farms in Roxbury and Mattapan, to name two locations and our lead partner in farmers market fish sales, Red's Best, is looking to expand their operation through renovations on the Boston Fish Pier (I should note that they are the leader in selling fresh day boat fish at numerous farmers markets in the area, significantly boosting sales and generating revenues for local fishermen). And we see more and more food trucks and their commissaries, as well as truck owners starting brick and mortar restaurants. If you're involved in food innovation in Boston, these are truly the best of times.

And we're just one city, if you look around the Commonwealth, this revolution is statewide, in urban and rural areas alike. We see groups like CISA and SEMAP and other regional coalitions, we see farmers looking to expand greenhouse production and storage facilities to support the growing number of regional farmers markets, and we see Massachusetts consumers, more and more attuned to "buying local" all across our state, enabling us to keep dollars and jobs and good food throughout the local economy.

Recently, we had a chance to meet with Project Bread, the state's leading anti-hunger advocacy organization, and the Massachusetts Farm Bureau. These diverse groups and others are generally supportive of the direction of this legislation and have offered to work with all of us to enact a program that is truly statewide, supporting food innovation in areas of need and areas of opportunity.

So we hope you will work with us to light a fire of food innovation across Massachusetts. Let's support new ventures and new jobs, farms old and new, and consumers who want to eat the best in locally-produced foods, made right here in Massachusetts. Thank you.